

# **Planning in Chesterfield County**

## **Fact Sheet**



### **Virginia State Law:**

- Compels localities to follow state laws. Localities cannot do more than the state allows them to do.
- Requires each locality to have a comprehensive plan. The Plan should promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of citizens.

### **The Comprehensive Plan:**

- Is general in nature, and a guide for making decisions regarding the future of the community.
- Is a guide for future development, recommending desirable land use patterns. It is implemented through the adoption and application of ordinances, guidelines and policies, and through the zoning process.
- Does not resolve existing problems, but may identify potential remedies for the future.
- Does not convey the right to develop land for a particular use or group of uses. Zoning, ordinances and development regulations convey the legal right to develop.
- Does not predict the timing of development. This is a function of market and demographic forces, and the decisions of property owners and developers.

### **Elements of Chesterfield County's Comprehensive Plan:**

- The Introduction to the Plan for Chesterfield outlines the major elements or guiding principals of the Plan. These are: (a) growth management (the timing and location of development); (b) economic development (the provision of jobs and tax revenues); (c) shaping the character of development (creating a sense of 'place'); (d) preserving important resources (water and natural resources, historic and cultural resources, etc.); and (e) maintaining healthy neighborhoods. The principals outlined in the Introduction serve as the basis for the recommendations within the Land Use Plan.
- The Land Use Plan is divided into distinct area, corridor, and village plan geographies. These plans recommend specific goals and actions, as well as land use recommendations, for these areas.

- The Thoroughfare Plan is a countywide plan for suggesting road locations and improvements to accommodate the anticipated future development pattern suggested by the Land Use Plan.
- The Bikeway Plan is a countywide plan for suggesting transportation improvements to accommodate and encourage bicycling.
- The Water Quality Protection Plan is a countywide plan for protecting water quality on a countywide basis.
- The Riverfront Plan is a plan suggesting ways to preserve and protect the James River and Appomattox River corridors as development occurs.
- The Public Facilities Plan is a countywide plan for promoting adequate public facilities to county citizens (fire and rescue services, schools, libraries, parks and recreational facilities, water and wastewater utilities, transportation, and energy and communication facilities).

### **Principals of Good Planning:**

- Citizens have an important part in developing the Plan. Citizens provide much of the vision for the community's future, which is then incorporated into the goals and recommendations of the Plan.
- County staff is charged with providing technical expertise and coordination, and with applying sound and legal planning principals to the Plan document.
- The Plan is a balance between individual property rights and the needs and desires of the larger community.
- The Plan seeks balance and coordination between land uses: places to live, work, shop, recreate, worship, socialize, learn.
- The Plan seeks to provide flexibility through families of uses (various densities of residential uses, mixes of compatible uses, etc.).
- The Plan seeks to provide transitions between incompatible uses by recommending intermediate uses between more and less intense uses (such as offices between residential areas and commercial or heavier industrial uses), and by recommending that natural features (such as streams and topography) and man-made features (such as major roads) serve to separate such uses.
- The Plan encourages the aggregation of smaller parcels into larger projects to promote land use transitions, protect neighborhoods, and provide a coordinated development pattern with compatible and mutually supporting uses.

- The Plan seeks to promote a nodal pattern of development, with commercial uses at major road intersections rather than in commercial strips, to better facilitate traffic flows, provide transitions, and create a sense of 'place'.

### **Process of Good Planning**

- A plan amendment is placed on the Planning Department work program.
- Planning staff, with the help of other county staff, studies existing conditions and development trends and publishes summaries of these conditions and trends.
- Citizens are invited to a series of meetings to learn about and participate in the Plan amendment process. Citizens provide much of the vision that shapes the Plan. In turn, the Plan helps shape the future of the community.
- Planning staff prepares the draft Plan (goals and recommended actions, land use map, etc.) together with implementing initiatives and ordinances.
- Planning staff reviews the draft with interested citizens, receiving feedback that is incorporated into the final draft documents.
- The Planning Commission reviews the draft Plan and receives citizen comment, then makes a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors (to adopt the Plan with or without changes, or to not adopt the Plan).
- The Board of Supervisors reviews the draft Plan and the Planning Commission recommendation, receives citizen comment, and adopts the Plan (with or without changes), or does not adopt the Plan.
- The adopted Plan is used by county citizens, staff, the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors uses to guide decisions affecting the county including, but not limited to, decisions regarding future land use, road networks and future rezoning actions.

### **Implementation of the Plan**

- The Comprehensive Plan does not zone, nor does the county develop, land (except for public facilities).
- The Comprehensive Plan does not grant, nor does it take away, a property owner's right to develop their land under its current zoning classification.

- The Comprehensive Plan serves as a guide for suggesting the appropriateness of future zoning actions when landowners and developers bring applications for rezoning to the Board of Supervisors for approval.
- The Comprehensive Plan may suggest strategies, policies, and/or ordinances designed to implement the goals and recommendations of the Plan. These may, or may not, be implemented as a result of the adoption of the Plan.

**Important Points to Remember:**

- The Comprehensive Plan recommends residential land use densities based on gross density. For example, a residential land use density of 1 unit per acre or less does not mean lots with a minimum size of 1 acre, but means 1 unit per gross acre of the overall development (100 units in a project of 100 acres). The minimum sizes of lots would be determined by zoning conditions or the kind of zoning requested (for example, R-12 requires a minimum lot size of 12,000 square feet). Some (or all) lots could be smaller than 1 acre, and some larger, or some of the land could be put into open space or used for recreational purposes such as community centers and swimming pools.
- Vacant or undeveloped land will not necessarily stay vacant or undeveloped.
- Chesterfield County does not build gas stations, shopping centers, subdivisions, etc. Individual property owners or developers build these improvements, based on the zoning of the land and applicable ordinances and development standards.
- The Plan does not confer the right to develop for a particular use. The zoning of the property and applicable ordinances and development standards determine what can be developed.
- The timing of development is influenced by market factors and the wishes of property owners and/or developers.
- The Plan, to be successful, must have citizen participation in all phases of its development, review and adoption. It is through the citizen participation process, and ultimately at the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors meetings, that citizens have the greatest opportunity to influence how, or even if, the Plan and ordinances will be adopted.
- Citizens have the greatest opportunities to influence how their community develops by participating in the Plan review and adoption process. Their influence is less during the zoning process, as much of what is decided through the zoning process is determined by the adopted Plan, if the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors follow the recommendations of the adopted Plan in their zoning decisions. Citizens' influence is still less during the site plan or subdivision processes, as much of what is approved through the site plan or subdivision processes is already determined by zoning, and by regulating ordinances and/or guidelines in place.